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NEWS

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MISSISSIPPI FORESTS FLOURISH DESPITE MAJOR WEATHER EVENTS, REPORT FINDS

Jackson, MS – The U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station (SRS) and the Mississippi Forestry Commission today announced findings of the 2006 Forest Inventory and Analysis report, titled “Mississippi’s Forests, 2006.” The report shows, among other things, that despite heavy damage from Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi’s total tree volume increased by 25 percent since the last inventory was conducted in 1994, while forestland area increased by 6 percent.

“The growth in tree cover illustrates how well-adapted the state’s forests are to disturbances,” said Jim Reaves, SRS director. “Even the agriculture-rich Delta experienced a 13 percent increase in forestland area.”

Tree volume pertains to the amount of wood contained in a tree and can be a reflection of tree size, while area pertains to the amount of land base covered with trees of various sizes.

The inventory for this report began shortly after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, one of the biggest tragedies to impact the Gulf Coast in the last century. Katrina resulted in varying degrees of damage to about four percent of live trees and impacted an estimated 7.8 million acres of forested land, or 40 percent of all forestland in Mississippi.

Katrina was one of many storms to affect the state’s forests between measurements. An estimated 323,000 acres were disturbed annually from weather related events. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported 646 tornadoes, 38 hurricanes and tropical storms, 990 flood events, and 35 snow and ice events in Mississippi from Jan. 1, 1994 and March 31, 2006.

The report also shows that the average annual net growth rate of live trees exceeded the average annual removal rate, ending the trend from 1970 to 1994 when average annual

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removals surpassed average annual net growth, an indication of overharvesting. For the current report period, softwood growth exceeds removals by 29 percent and hardwood growth exceeds removals by 22 percent.

“While harvests have declined over the years, the forest products industry continues to be a vital component of the state’s economy with timber ranking as the second most valuable agricultural product,” said Mississippi State Forester Charlie Morgan. “The report shows that Mississippi landowners received \$10.8 billion for their standing timber between 1995 and 2006, or nearly \$899 million annually.”

Additionally, the report shows about 103 sawmills, pulpwood mills, and other primary wood-processing plants distributed across the state directly employed nearly 18,000 individuals in 2005 with an annual payroll of \$685 million. At the same time, the combined value of shipments for the wood products and paper manufacturing sectors, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, was about \$2.24 billion.

Almost 100 percent of Mississippi’s 19.6 million acres of forestland is potentially available for timber production with the majority (78 percent) currently owned by nonindustrial private landowners. Another 10 percent is owned by forest industry, while 7 percent is owned by the National Forest System and 5 percent owned by other public entities, including state lands and other federal lands.

The report also shows that Mississippi’s forests provide more than just environmental benefits; they also provide economic and social benefits through goods and services. Wood products, non-timber forest products, and forest-related recreation, e.g., tourism, hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing, all contribute to the development of Mississippi’s economy.

Of great concern to Mississippi forests are the southern pine beetle (SPB) and pine engraver beetles, the most devastating insect species threatening Mississippi’s softwood resource. Credited with an outbreak in 1995 that covered 24 counties and caused over \$16 million in damages, the SPB has affected much of the Southern United States in the last 60 years, and has continued to impact Mississippi’s forests since the 1994 forest inventory.

The report revealed that the Japanese honeysuckle is the most frequently recorded nonnative invasive plant species on Mississippi forests, with observations on 53 percent of the measured subplots in the state. Nonnative privet and Japanese climbing fern were the next most commonly recorded species, with records on 26 percent and 6 percent of the measured subplots, respectively.

“Mississippi’s Forests, 2006,” is the eighth state inventory report produced. The complete report can be found on the SRS website at: http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rb/rb_srs147.pdf.

SRS administers the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, in partnership with state forestry agencies. The FIA program supplies the nation’s land managers and private forest landowners with the data needed to make sound investment decisions in forest management activities. FIA data enables states, researchers, foresters, landowners and natural resource communities to understand the magnitude of changes in forest conditions and trends, and provides vital information to the long-term health of forests.

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